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TONY P. HALL
CHAIRMAN

Select Committee on Hunger
U.S. House of Representatives
H2-505 House Office Building Annex 2
Washington, D.C. 20515

news release

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For further information: Neal Flieger
(202) 226-5470

HALL MOVES TO CUT U.S. AID TO INDONESIA

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CITES RIGHTS ABUSES AGAINST TIMORESE CIVILIANS

Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-OH), today introduced legislation to terminate all U.S. bilateral assistance to Indonesia, citing that nation's history of human rights violations against the citizens of East Timor. Joining Hall as original co-sponsors of the legislation were Reps. Tom Downey (D-NY), Joseph Moakley (D-MA), Ron Machtley (R-RI), and Barney Frank (D-MA).

"This is strong legislation, but a strong response is long overdue to Indonesia's aggression, repression, and terror in East Timor," Hall said in a statement accompanying the bill's introduction in the House. "At a time when every U.S. foreign aid dollar is undergoing rigorous scrutiny, why should the taxpayers provide aid to a nation which has seized and subjugated its neighbor? The Congress can both save money and stand for principle in terminating aid to Indonesia."

On December 7th, 1975, Indonesian military forces invaded the former Portuguese colony of East Timor; the territory was made the 27th Province of Indonesia the following year. Since then, international rights groups have continued to report widespread and ongoing violations of basic human rights. The most recent incident to draw world attention was the Indonesian military's massacre of 75 to 100 Timorese civilians participating in a funeral march on November 12, 1991. Hall noted that, although there have been other atrocities in East Timor since 1975, this particular incident was different.

"The atrocity was videotaped by an outsider who succeeded in smuggling the tape out of the militarized territory," he said. "In addition, two American reporters , Allan Nairn and Amy Goodman, were savagely beaten and nearly killed by the Indonesian soldiers who perpetrated the massacre. They survived to become witnesses to the world of the tragedy of East Timor."

Hall has been the leading Congressional proponent for the cause of East Timor since coming to Congress in 1979, as the author of resolutions and letters to officials of the Indonesian government, United Nations, and U.S. Government calling attention to the plight of the Timorese.

The bill Hall introduced would terminate all bilateral assistance and suspends the Generalized System of Preference (GSP) benefits for Indonesian products, and requires the U.S. Representative to the World Bank to oppose any loan to Indonesia. Estimated FY 1992 military and economic aid for Indonesia is about $58 million; commercial arms deliveries are about $43 million, and Foreign Military Sales add another $10 million. Meanwhile, Indonesia has exported millions of dollars of duty-free products to the U.S. The U.S. trade deficit with Indonesia is currently $1.3 billion.

"The United States Government should not allow Indonesia to use proceeds from preferential trade with our Nation as a means to assist in the continued suppression of the people of East Timor," added Downey, who serves on the Trade Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Under the Members' legislation, the termination of aid would remain in effect until the President certifies that Indonesia has withdrawn its troops from East Timor, allowed a UN supervised referendum for Timorese self-determination, and international monitors have reported the cessation of human rights violations.

"It is insufficient to beg the Indonesians repeatedly to treat the Timorese with basic human decency," Hall said. "This is like condoning slavery, but asking the slave driver to spare the whip. Attention must instead be focused on getting the Indonesians to withdraw from East Timor and allow the Timorese to participate in a referendum on self-determination."

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